Third-Party Intervention in Intrastate War

Do Outcomes Match Intensions?

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Contents

1 Introduction

After the end of the Cold War there was optimism that the number of conflicts would decrease but this hope was dashed with the emergence of numerous intrastate conflicts in Europe, Africa, and Asia. The world seems far from being in peace with conflicts raging in Syria, Ukraine, Yemen, South Sudan and the DR Congo. Not only are these internal armed conflicts associated with high costs in terms of human lives, they also plummet states into economic depression and spill over to neighboring countries, thereby negatively affecting the stability of entire regions. These kinds of conflicts have become increasingly difficult to resolve and the international community finds itself in the position of deciding whether it should merely stand idly by or actively intervene into conflicts, may it be for humanitarian or strategic reasons. Existing literature in the field of civil wars has found that third-party intervention can both promote and inhibit the ongoing conflicts. While the presence of impartial third parties as guarantees can act as a de-escalator to conflicts (Walter 2009), direct military support to one conflict side or the other potentially prolongs wars (Regan 2002a). However, there are other forms of outside support than troops. A growing reluctance to engage militarily in states at war is partly due to a decreasing willingness to risk one's own soldiers' lives in conflicts abroad and partly due to the failure rate of previous military interventions. In this context, delivering money, weapons, and training to conflict zones has become a convenient solution for many Western states that constitutes a middle ground between being a passive bystander and sending troops. In Syria, the US provided weapons to the rebels fighting the autocratic Assad regime and in Ukraine, the pro-government forces have received arms in order to fight the separatist movement. This idea of helping warring parties help themselves is not new. During the Cold War, the US and the USSR frequently lent "support of an indirect nature" (Henderson 2013, 643) to government and opposition groups in so-called proxy wars. While there are all sorts of legal and moral deliberations dominating the debate on interventions in policy circles as well as in academia, the question of which form of intervention is successful in what respects is addressed less systematically. This paper tries to contribute to existing research by investigating the relationship between various forms of third-party intervention (military, non-military, troops) into intrastate wars and different conflict outcomes (rebel or government victory, negotiated settlement, low intensity conflict). We find that outside intervention has very limited effect on conflict outcomes and that it is rather the nature of the conflict itself that determines how it ends. The paper proceeds as follows: In the following part, we review some of the relevant literature on intrastate conflict intervention and termination. Part 3 presents our theoretical model from which we derive four hypotheses about the impact of different types of third party intervention on the outcome of conflict. After establishing our methodology in part 4, we empirically test this model in section 5. Part 6 presents our results and we conclude the paper in section 7.

2 Literature Review

In the literature, several options for outside actors to intervene in conflicts have been explored theoretically. In early research, Snyder and Jervis (1999) suggest that conflict situations can be analyzed in the framework of a security dilemma. A "security dilemma is a situation in which each party's efforts to increase its own security reduce the security altogether" (Jervis and Snyder 1999, 15). According to this narrative, civil wars very much resemble the Hobbesian state of nature, in which conditions of anarchy due to lacking state capacities and competition over territory and power might make attack the best form of defense when one feels threatened(Visser and Duyvesteyn 2014). Within this framework, ending a war means breaking off the dilemma structure. One resolution to the civil war security dilemma is one party achieving military victory and as a result taking over the rule. The winner will disarm his opponents and unite all the power, thereby creating stability (Toft 2010). Empirical evidence proves that civil wars ending in the military defeat of one party are less likely to relapse into violence than conflicts ending with negotiated settlements. This finding has prompted some scholars to argue for a laissez-faire approach towards civil conflicts, suggesting that it might be best to "give war a chance" (Toft 2010, 7) and let the parties fight until a clear winner emerges. Applying this logic to foreign interventions, Snyder and Jervis (1999) and Regan (1996) suggest for third-party interveners to change the dilemma structure either by increasing the costs for the parties to fight and reducing the costs of peace or by putting in place a hegemonic power that imposes peace on the

warring parties. While changing the incentive structure can be achieved by negotiating peace agreements or by implementing monitoring mechanisms like peacekeeping operations, dominating power can be established by implementing outside rule or by strengthening one side in the conflict in order to make it the dominant group (Jervis and Snyder 1999, 27).

In an early attempt to quantify the relationship between foreign intervention and civil wars, Regan (1996) investigated the conditions for successful third-party intervention into intrastate wars. He found that it is the type of the intervention strategy rather than the nature of the conflict that determines the success of an intervention. Distinguishing between two intervention strategies, military and economic intervention, Regan established that a mix of the two strategies rather than either type alone would be more effective. However, he found that in general, conflicts experiencing external interventions are less likely to terminate than those without. These findings were confirmed in Regan's subsequent research that modeled the success of an intervention as a function of (1) the strategic environment in which the conflict is being waged; (2) the existence of a humanitarian crisis associated with the conflict; (3) the number of fatalities; and (4) the intensity of the conflict (Regan 2002b; Regan 2002a).

The early 2000s saw a broad range of similar quantitative research, establishing links between intervention and the duration of civil war as well as the number of casualties. Lacina (2006) testifies that conflicts with interventions result in significantly higher numbers of fatalities and Cunningham (2010) evokes that the involvement of third parties significantly prolongs civil wars.

Related to that, a further strand of literature emphasizes the goals and the bias of the interveners. Regan (2002) established that a unilateral intervention in general leads to longer wars, while impartial interventions have to potential to shorten conflicts. Contrary to that, Cunningham (2010) shows that engagement by third parties with an unbiased agenda and goals independent of any of the warring sides, prolong civil wars.

Elbadawi and Sambanis (2000) were amongst the first to distinguish between a third party lending support to the rebels or government. In the logic of the security dilemma, this distinction is void since intervention is merely about balancing out the powers, no matter on which side. Elbadawi (2000) modeled in how far supporting the rebels or supporting the government makes a difference for the duration of conflict. Taking into account the strategic considerations rebels and governments make when faced with a potential intervention, they find that the net effect of intervention on the duration of conflict is negative. Elbadawi and Sambanis discovered that interventions backing rebels against autocratic regimes prolong conflicts because they strengthen rebellions that could have been defeated easily otherwise.

In a very recent article, Sullivan and Karreth (2015) explore this relationship further. Taking rebel and government military strength into account, they argue that the success of third party intervention on either side in the form of troops depends on the relative military capacities of the warring parties. Disaggregating different conflict outcomes (rebel victory, government victory, negotiated settlement, and low intensity conflict), the article concludes that troop support to rebels increases the likelihood of rebel victory and reduces the likelihood of low intensity conflicts. Military assistance to the government, on the other hand, influences the outcome of conflict only, when the rebels are sufficiently strong because otherwise, additional military capacities for the government are unlikely to be critical to regime survival. Assistance to a severely threatened government significantly improves the odds of regime survival and reduces the likelihood of rebel victory, while supporting a relatively strong government does not affect the odds of any of the conflict outcomes.

Instead of differentiating between various conflict outcomes, Sawyer et al. (2015) focus on different types of support such as weapons, money, intelligence, or troops, and argue that they have different effects on the chance of an intrastate conflict ending. Looking at support to the rebel side only, they establish that more fungible resources given to rebels decrease the chances of civil war termination, while other types of support have either no or the opposing effect. Their argument is that the most fungible forms of support to rebels create uncertainty about rebel capability on the state side, which on the one hand inhibits the state's willingness to negotiate settlements and on the other sets incentives for the rebels to continue fighting.

3 Third Party Intervention and Conflict Outcomes

This paper tries to combine this research by examining how different types of interventions in support of either the rebels or the government affect the outcome of a conflict. In this section, we put forward a theoretical framework for our analysis, utilizing a mixture of the asymmetric power and bargaining approach.

3.1 Asymmetric Power in Civil Wars

We assume that a civil war has the following structure: An intrastate war begins with a rebel group attacking the state. Rebels are generally weaker than the government and engage in unconventional military tactics like terrorism or guerilla warfare. Government, on the other hand, has stronger military capacities and "presents a non-elusive target" (Butler and Gates 2009, 337), as their conventional force makes is difficult for them to hide from the opposition. In a cost benefit logic, rebels try to impose costs on the government by engaging in indirect war fighting strategies and the government, in turn, evaluates when these costs get too high and react to the conflict accordingly (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009). First, if the rebels impose costs on the state that are high enough that the state feels threatened, the state fights the rebels back. The success of the government in defeating the rebels depends on the strength of the rebel group. If the group is relatively strong and has sufficient military capabilities, it is easier for the government to target the rebels with conventional military power. If the opposition is weak and a diffuse target, the government is unlikely to be successful in defeating the rebels entirely (Butler and Gates 2009). Second, instead of trying to defeat the opposition, governments can offer a peace settlement, which the rebels can accept or decline. The government seeks settlement with the opposition, if a) the costs of completely defeating the rebels are relatively high and b) it can be assumed that the rebels are unlikely to resume fighting. In order to provoke a government reaction, the rebels thus need to send a strong signal of their capacity since states are only willing to bargain with and make concessions to opposition groups that can cause a certain threshold of damage (Walter 2009). At the same time, while the incumbent government usually has the better bargaining position due to its relatively stronger military power, there is a high degree of uncertainty about the rebels' capacity to continue fighting (Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2015). Under these circumstances, the government has to evaluate whether it is likely that the rebels resume fighting. If it perceives it as probable that the rebels will not keep their part of the agreement, a negotiation offer is unlikely. The rebels accept and maintain peace, when it is their best alternative, considering their own and the governments fighting capacity and their resulting likelihood to either win or enforce further concessions. Rebels can "bluff their way to more concessions" (Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2015) by pretending to be stronger than they are. This strategy, however, bears the risk of the government continuing to fight and pulling back the peace offer.

Conflict outcome is thus a function of both government and rebel capacities. A rebel military victory should be rare overall, simply because rebels lack the military capacities to challenge a government. At the same time, a clear defeat of the rebels is difficult to achieve because conventional government forces are less successful in asymmetric warfare. Consequently, state forces prevail in most intrastate conflicts but rebel groups can survive by using asymmetric warfare tactics over an extended period of time. Once the costs inflicted by rebels become too high, the government can extend a bargaining offer, if it expects the rebels to accept it. The opposition accepts the offer and sticks to it, when they believe to have received the best possible offer.

3.2 Third-party Intervention

These dynamics can change when third parties intervene from the outside and influence the fighting capacities of rebels or the state. We distinguish between three different types of support warring parties can receive - troops, military, and non-military.
Gent (2008) argues that rebel-biased troop support is more effective than government-biased foreign interventions in producing the intended result of a military victory of the respective side. He appeals to the idea that outside forces only intervene in support of the rebels if they conceive the rebels as strong and likely to prevail in first place. Consequently, with rebel support, there is an ex ante bias for a rebel victory because military intervention is more likely in the cases where rebels are much stronger anyway. At the same

time, providing rebels with other forms of military support, such as heavy military equipment, might in fact increase the chances of winning for the government. A higher military sophistication might force the rebels to shift their strategy away from guerilla tactics because they can no longer operate in the hide, which will lead to more exposure and confrontational clashes with the government forces. Assuming that an asymmetry of power prevails even with military support, weak conventional rebel forces might be an easy target for stronger government troops (Sullivan and Karreth 2014). In a similar rationale, providing troops or military equipment to the government does not per se make a government victory more likely, since conventional force is only effective when it can be directed against a specific, visible target. Asymmetric power distribution in a civil war can render government military force highly ineffectual against weak rebel groups practicing guerilla warfare. Troops and military support from a third party increase the likelihood of government victory and decreases the likelihood of rebel victory only, when rebel troops are sufficiently strong (Butler and Gates 2009). All forms of military support to government, however, increase government power, making it more difficult for rebels to inflict high enough costs on governments for a peace negotiation to be initiated. While troops and other forms of military support can only be used in a very specific way within a limited timeframe, more "fungible" (Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2015), non-military types of support can be utilized in various ways and at various points in time. Money, as the most fungible resource, can be invested into infrastructure, recruitment, training, or arms, it can be saved or spent immediately, and it is thus more difficult for the government to assess changing rebel capacities (Hazen 2013). Consequently, when rebels receive non-military outside support, uncertainty on the government side increases and creates credibility and commitment problems that prevent negotiations from taking place. On the one hand, governments might be less willing to settle the conflict because they expect rebels to break the peace agreement. On the other, rebels might not be willing to commit to peace in the first place, because their increased capacities might change their assumptions about their abilities to fight the government in the future (Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2015).
Within our theoretical framework, it is unclear how non-military support should differ from development programmes or financial aid. We thus cannot establish a direct link between non-military support to the incumbent and conflict outcomes. However, we should expect to see a similar effect to the provision of troops and military equipment, since financial means allow the government to upgrade their military capacities. Again, the state can only benefit from conventional military power if the opposition constitutes a tangible target. A negotiated settlement seems to become less likely with increasing government capacities, since a government perceiving itself as strong is less likely to offer a deal to the rebels.

Assuming that a third party intervening would want to either bring about a victory of the supported party or promote a negotiated settlement, we can derive a set of hypothesis:

$H_1a: Troops support to rebels will increase the probability of rebel military victory. $H_1b: Military support to rebels will increase the probability of government military victory, and decrease the probability of rebel military victory. $H_2a: Troops and military support to governments will increase the probability of government military victory and decrease the probability of rebel victory only when opposition military strength approaches that of the state. $H_2b: Troops and military support to governments will decrease the likelihood of a negotiated settlement. $H_3: Non-military support to rebels decreases the likelihood of a negotiated settlement. $H_4a: Non-military support to governments will increase the probability of government military victory only when opposition military strength approaches that of the state. $H_4b: Non-military support to governments will decrease the likelihood of a negotiated settlement.

4 Methodology

This section sets the methodological framework for our analysis. After presenting some definitions, we introduce our data and variables and describe the choice of our research design.

4.1 Definitions and Level of Analysis

We base our definition of conflict on the terminology introduced by the University of Uppsalla Conflict Data Program (UCDP) together with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) (Themner and Wallensteen 2011; Gleditsch et al. 2002). A 'major armed conflict' or 'war' is characterized by at least 1,000 battle related, military or civilian, deaths a year, while conflicts with 25 to 999 battle deaths a year are categorized as 'minor armed conflict'. They further distinguish other forms of violence from conflicts by adding the component of an organized effective violent opposition to the government, thereby excluding genocides and similar forms of violence from their definition of conflict. As is common in recent conflict research, Sullivan and Kenneth take conflict dyads as their level of analysis, modeling civil wars as dyadic struggles between the government and an opposition party instead of focusing on the state-level. Conflict dyads record each violent interaction between an incumbent regime and an opposition and this unit of analysis thus allows us to isolate the effect of weapons deliveries to one side of the dyad and its effect on ending violence. Both NSA data as well as UCDP data are available as conflict dyads, which makes a merging of different datasets easier.

4.2 Data

We use as a baseline for our analysis a publicly available dataset created by Sullivan and Karreth (Sullivan and Karreth 2014), which will henceforth be referred to as the CIMI Dataset. Sullivan and Karreth draw from the 3.3 version of the Non-state Actors (NSA) dataset (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013), as well as the University of Uppsala Conflict Data Program's (UCDP) Conflict Termination Dataset (Kreutz 2010) and External Support Dataset (Hoegbladh, Pettersson, and Themner 2011). For the purpose of testing our hypotheses, we complement the CIMI dataset with additional variables included in the NSA data, which leaves us with 497 conflict dyad spells over a period of time from 1946 to 2010.

Our dependent variable is conflict outcome, since we are interested in the impact of outside intervention on the termination of conflict. We adopt conflict_outcome from the CIMI Dataset, which disaggregates outcome into four different conflict outcomes coded from the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset. Accordingly, internal conflicts either fade out into a period of low activity (0), they end with a victory by the rebels (1), they terminate with some form of negotiated settlement (2), or with government victory (3). The most common outcome for a conflict dyad is low activity, defined as a violent conflict with less than 25 deaths per year for at least one year. While 44% of all conflict dyads level off like that, 35% end in a victory of one side. Governments win the conflict in 22% of the cases, rebels prevail in only 13%. 21% of conflicts terminate with a negotiated settlements.

Our main explanatory variable is the type of support provided to government and rebels by third parties. Drawing from the NSA Dataset, we create two variables for support to the rebels (rtypesupport) and to the government (gtypesupport) and code them as categorical variables. The limited availability of detailed conflict data only allows us to distinguish between three different categories, troops (1), military (2), and non-military support (3), as coded in the NSA Dataset. Although the dataset does not provide us with a more detailed description of what is included in each category (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013), we can nevertheless use the variable as a proxy to test our theoretical model. While the provision of troops is an unambiguous category, military and non-military support are not as clear-cut classifications. However, the variable captures the basic idea of non-military support to rebels creating uncertainty and military support increasing the conventional military capacity of rebels. In 20% of the cases, governments are supported with troops, in 72% they receive some other form of military support. Only in 7% of the cases, third-party governments support the government with non-military means. Similar to support to governments, by far the most common type of support is military support with 70%. Both troops and non-military support are less frequent with 14% and 15%, respectively.

The second key explanatory factor in our theory is a party's military capacity relative to the opponent's capacity. CIMI operationalizes rebel military capacity as a dichotomous variable with rebels at least as militarily strong as the government coded 1, and rebels weaker as the government in terms of personnel, weapons, and equipment as 0. Since fighting capacity is coded as a relative measure, CIMI introduces the log of GDP per capita as a measure for government strength since rebels could be strong in relation to a weak

government and at the same time have very limited actual capacities (Sullivan and Karreth 2014). Since we hypothesized that the success of intervetion on government side depends on the strength of the rebels (Hypotheses 2 and 4), we code an interaction term between rebel fighting capacity and a pro-government intervention dummy variable. It further has been suggested that the duration of the conflict and government success are negatively associated because rebels are more likely to gain strength over the duration of a conflict (Brandt et al. 2008; Karl, Sobek, and others 2004). We control for duration by including the natural log of the conflict duration in years. Taking into account the motivation of the rebels, we borrow from Sullivan and Karreth a variable indicating whether the war is a secessionist conflict because we expect that secessionist wars affect conflict outcomes differently than wars aiming at regime change (Karl, Sobek, and others 2004; Regan 2002b). Similarly, we control for whether the rebel group has a legal political wing that could be integrated into the government (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009).

4.3 Statistical Model

In our research, we seek to examine how different types of external support to both rebels and governments during civil war influence the outcome of conflicts. In line with this encounter, we apply a regression design to assess the relationship between conflict outcome as our dependent variable and the support types as explanatory variables. Since our dependent variable is a discrete variable, taking on four different values (0 = low intensity conflict, 1 = victory, 2 = negotiated settlement, 3 = victory), we employ a multinomial logistic regression model. Instead of running one single model, we break up the multinomial regression into two separate estimations and separately regress government-biased and rebel-biased intervention on conflict outcome.

$$Pr(Y_i = j) = \frac{exp(X_i\beta_j)}{\sum_{j=1}^{J} exp(X_i\beta_j)} \tag{1}$$

In our model, j represents each of the four outcomes and i indexes the unit of analysis, being a dyadic episode of intrastate armed conflict. We omit the most common conflict outcome, low intensity conflict, as the baseline category and calculate estimates for the remaining outcomes government victory, negotiated settlement and rebel victory. The results tell us how different kinds of third-party intervention affect the likelihood of a conflict having a specific outcome vs. the reference (low intensity conflict).

5 Results and Discussion

Table 1 displays the results of three multinomial logit estimations. Model 1 regresses our main explanatory variable, the type of support, on the dependent variable conflict outcome. Model 2 adds as a further explanatory variable the relative fighting capacity of rebels and the interaction term. In Model 3, we include our set of control variables. The Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) decreases from Model 1 to Model 3, which indicates that the model fit improves, when adding more predictor variables.
In our full model, we see that support to the government is negatively, yet insignificantly, associated with all conflict outcomes. While we did expect these results for the case of negotiated settlement and rebel victory, our theory cannot account for the negative relationship between pro-government intervention and government victory. Troop support to rebels significantly decreases the likelihood of rebel victory, which is another counterintuitive, but significant, result.
As for our controls, we find that a high fighting capacity of rebels relative to government significantly decreases the probability of a negotiated settlement and government victory, while it increases the likelihood of a rebel victory. These results make sense, considering that once rebels are too strong the government is unlikely to offer them a deal because they doubt the rebels' commitment. The interaction term multiplying rebel fighting capacity and intervention on behalf of the government is highly significant for both rebel and government victory. Hence, in case of strong rebels, any type of government support makes a clear military victory for one side more likely. This finding supports our theory when strong rebels constitute a clear and tangible

military target and can thus engage in conventional warfare with the government until a clear winner emerges. The control for the duration of conflict seems to negatively influence the chances of government victory, a finding widely supported in civil war literature. Of further importance are characteristics of the rebel group. Secessionist movements significantly decrease the chances for a negotiated settlement and slightly increase the probability for a rebel victory. Both these links make intuitively sense. A Type II analysis of deviance for our model indicated that our main predictor variables are statistically significant at the 5% level. From this discrepancy in the findings, we conclude that either our theoretical model or our statistical analysis entails problems. Since our theory is grounded solidly in already existing research, we assume that due to the nature of conflict data, complex statistical models pose severe challenges. The data we based our analysis on is severely limited. From the total of 497 observation in our merged dataset, there were only 40 complete cases, which is not enough to test a model with that many predictor variables. Note that for this reason, we also substituted one of our explanatory categorical variables, government support, with a dichotomous intervention variable. From a theoretical point, this substitutions was unproblematic, since we predicted all forms of government support to have a similar effect on the outcome of conflict.

Table 1: Table 1: Multinomial Logistic Regression

	Dependent variable:		
	Rebel Victory	Negotiation	Gov. Victory
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Rebel Troops	-12.06^{***}	-55.21	45.42
	(0.65)	(76.53)	(35.89)
Rebel Military	14.44	-75.19	40.87
	(30.32)	(95.40)	(36.07)
Rebel Non-military	0.00	0.00	0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Gov. Support Dummy	-15.86	-74.68	-48.50
	(30.30)	(66.85)	(35.23)
Rebel Strength	19.64^{***}	-97.85^{***}	-91.07^{***}
	(0.0000)	(0.00)	(0.91)
Gov. Intervention x Strong Rebels	15.96^{***}	-23.92	92.02^{***}
	(0.0000)		(0.91)
GDP	-19.58	14.70	0.85
	(63.34)	(15.44)	(1.83)
Duration	57.09	14.33	-2.12^{*}
	(169.85)	(18.07)	(1.25)
Reb. Legal Wing	-12.03	22.57	5.04^{**}
	(240.61)	(20.79)	(2.36)
Secessionist	0.67^{***}	-64.54^{***}	-0.65
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(1.83)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	75.68	75.68	75.68
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

6 Conclusion

In policy-making, intervention is often depicted as a solution to internal conflicts, while at the same time, academic research has revealed that intervention oftentimes rather prolongs and exacerbates civil wars. In this paper, we set out to contribute to the current civil war research by examining closer the relationship between different forms of third-party intervention into intrastate conflict and conflict outcomes. We derived a theoretical model from the assumption that under the conditions of asymmetric power in civil wars, rebels and government face a bargaining problem. We hypothesized that troops and other forms of military and non-military support provided to the government increase the likelihood for a military victory of the incumbent only, when rebel forces are sufficiently strong and thus constitute a tangible target. Troop support to rebels, on the other hand, has an unconditional positive effect on the likelihood of rebel victory. Supplying rebels with military equipment should, in fact, decrease the probability of the opposition winning because it makes them more vulnerable to conventional government force. When rebels receive non-military assistant from a third party, negotiated settlements become less likely because more fungible support creates uncertainty about the credible commitment of rebels to peace, which might deter the government from bargaining in first place. Our statistical analysis indicated that intervention on the government side indeed decreases the likelihood of rebel victory and a negotiated settlement. Troop support to the rebels equally seems to make a negotiated settlement less likely. Overall, we did not find any significant impact of intervention on conflict outcomes. While this might very well be due to the limited data situation, the finding might also point into an entirely different direction: Maybe the West is unable to influence civil wars in any meaningful way.

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